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Jürgen Mettepenningen, Nouvelle Théologie, New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II

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NOUVELLE THÉOLOGIE—NEW THEOLOGY: INHERITOR OF MODERNISM, PRECURSOR OF VATICAN II, by Jürgen Mettepenningen, T&T Clark, 2010, pp. xv+218, £19.99/\$34.95 pbk, £65/\$130 hbk

This detailed yet suitably broad examination of *nouvelle théologie* adds considerably to what is already available on a topic in which interest is currently expanding. Central to Mettepenningen's thesis is that *nouvelle théologie* passed through four phases: the *ressourcement* of Thomism by means of a return to the texts of Thomas himself; a wider theological *ressourcement*, which drew on patristics; internationalization as ideas spread from France into the Low Countries; and assimilation into magisterial teaching at the Second Vatican Council. The author is aware of the pitfalls of trying to define *nouvelle théologie* as a coherent school or movement. Indeed, his careful and extensive research, drawing on published and archival materials in several languages, helps demonstrate its diverse and multi-faceted character as a 'cluster concept'. Nevertheless, considerable attention is focused on the controversies of the immediate postwar period, from the election of Jean-Baptiste Janssens as the new Jesuit superior general in September 1946 through to *Humani generis* four years later and the silencings, exiles and censorship surrounding it. This is a clear exposition of a complex and important concatenation of events.

Particularly welcome is the study's attention to Dominican contributors: Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu, but also lesser-known figures like Henri-Marie Féret (in a triumvirate with the previous two), Louis Charlier and René Draguet. It is certainly true that too much attention can be devoted to Jesuits when defining *nouvelle théologie*'s key events and personages, and Mettepenningen's approach avoids this imbalance. Partly in consequence of his attention to Dominicans, Belgians have more coverage than they are often granted, with extensive use made of archives in Mechelen, Louvain-la-Neuve, Brussels, Nijmegen and Louvain. Especially informative is the discussion of Piet Schoonenberg's utilization of history and evolution, including in the work of Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, as inroads into a *nouvelle christologie* in which the terms of Chalcedon are set alongside a thoroughgoing historical and developmental view of Christ's humanity. In this and other discussions, Mettepenningen reveals the interactions between Dominicans and Jesuits, thereby showing that the two orders did not operate in parallel, disconnected universes.

The author contends that Dominicans beginning with Congar comprised the first phase of *nouvelle théologie*, setting an agenda subsequently taken up by Jesuits. A key component of his case is a previously neglected article written by Congar for the Catholic newspaper *Sept* in January 1935 in which he critically and systematically assessed the current state of theology, identifying a ruptured spiritual realm in which modern development was proceeding in separation from a clerical-theological world still debating in a dead language. Congar developed these insights later that year in the periodical *La Vie Intellectuelle* in an assessment of the causes of secularization. Similarly iconoclastic is Mettepenningen's suggestion that Henri Bouillard, born in 1908 and a figure to whom little attention is usually given, instigated the second 'Jesuit' phase of *nouvelle théologie* with his 1944 study *Conversion et grâce chez saint Thomas d'Aquin*, published two years before de Lubac's *Surnaturel*.

Such provocations add considerable interest, making the book more than simply a review of publications and scholarly debates in journals. They are the prerogative of the thorough researcher, but invite rejoinder. The need to re-engage theology with history and reality was certainly a key imperative motivating *nouvelle théologie*, but Teilhard de Chardin had been writing in terms similar to Congar's almost ten years earlier in *Le Milieu divin*, which achieved wide circulation via private presses. Furthermore, new theological departures around grace and nature had been developed in the «La Pensée» discussion group at the principal French Jesuit theologate even before its return from Hastings to Lyons in 1926. The Dominicans certainly seem to have systematized and publicized their projects better than the Jesuits (witness also Chenu's better-known *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*, distributed *pro manuscripto* in 1937), and the importance of these efforts should not be discounted. Yet because of the heavy regulation of study houses in this era, the genesis and chronology of ideas cannot be assessed solely on the basis of publications or explicit manifestoes.

Mettepenningen's narrative could be filled out with more extensive reflection on the role of major political and social upheavals in shaping *nouvelle théologie*. The Second World War surely did

far more than disrupt the normal scholarly routine and debates in journals: it was generative of new theology. For instance, Yves de Montcheuil spent much time exhorting lay Christians to spiritual resistance against Nazism, thereby laying foundations for the central place *Lumen gentium* accords in the Church to the laity. De Lubac countered anti-Semitic propaganda with constructive reappraisals of Jewish-Christian relationships, and these contributed to his developing biblical hermeneutics and political theology.

What of the book's central thesis that *nouvelle théologie* formed a bridge from modernism to Vatican II? The earlier side of the bridge is well-delineated, with good discussion of the *Tübinger Schule* and Newman alongside Vatican I's *Dei Filius* and neo-scholasticism. Moreover, reflecting on the association with modernism helps account for the hostile reception *nouvelle théologie* was accorded by church authorities, while the long quotation from *Dei Filius* reminds us that historical discussions of the grace–nature relation served as a foil for debating that document. The bridge's later side (the author's fourth developmental phase) remains more implicit, however, perhaps because the case appears self-evident. Indeed, unlike the other three phases, it is not assigned its own section. Nevertheless, the thesis is well-argued, and shows in detail where some of the key ideas of Vatican II came from. To reassure the anxious, however, let it be added that if *nouvelle théologie* functioned as such a bridge, then it was a bridge possessing its own distinctive features and not simply a means of transferring one set of doctrines, including some dubious ones, into a new context. By means of patristic *ressourcement*, including the recovery of the doctrine of the spiritual senses of scripture, *nouvelle théologie* corrected serious deficiencies in the modernist project as well as embracing that project's underlying intuitions.